

B24 Liberator (? 44-10577) CRASH AT SHOTESHAM 1st April 1945



After seeing this photograph of the artefacts held at the Flixton Air Museum I spoke to their historian (Hubie) to advise him that I thought the details regarding the crash site were incorrect. I then contacted Jim Carey Old Buckenham museum historian and also Bob Collis Aviation Historian and he kindly forwarded the following reports for perusal. From these reports and other information concerning the fate of B24 44 – 10577 in 1945, I am certain that this is not the aircraft I witnessed immediately prior to it actually crashing at Grub Street Shotesham.

Met Reports

The Met reports for the 1st April 1945 for AAF 104 Hardwick and AAF 144 Old Buckenham, and AAF146 Seething indicate roughly the same conditions at all three places ie. Cloudy 1500 ft , Visibility 7/8 miles, wind 25/30mph.

MEMO From Flying Control Office AAF Station 144 to Accident Classification Officer 4 April 1945
States: Subject Aircraft Accident B24J Number 44-10577

" On 1 April 1945 at 1.10 hours B24J, 44-10577 took off on a non operational flight. At 1555 hours the aircraft made a second touch and go"

MEMO From HQ 93D Bomb Group (AAF 104) Flying Control Officer 1 April 1945

States: Subject Aircraft Crash

- 1 "At 1605 a crash was observed about 3 miles north of the field" ??
- 2 " Crash truck and ambulances were despatched. The hospital and Military Police were notified"
- 3 " Two bodies identified as John Jurko & Elton Q Webber were recovered . The Co-pilot 2nd Lt C P Colgan was treated and transferred to Morley Hall". The plane was a complete Wash Out.

AAF 144 (Old Buckenham) REPORT of AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT – 5 April 1945

"Place 8 Miles North of Hardwick, Date 1 April 1945, B24J 44-10577, AAF Station 144"

In the Description of Accident (Narrative) it states: "local test flight" "engine feathered at low altitude" "could not unfeather engine-crew told to bale out" "Plane dipped the left wing clipped a tree, crashed and burned"

AM. Form 1100 Accident Report Card (extract)

Date 1/4/45 – Aircraft B24J 44-10577

Drome. Old Buckenham Place. Shotesham

Purpose of Flight: "Test Flight"

"Airborne with crew of four"

"aircraft approached Shotesham from S"

"Smoke from engine" "turned towards USAAF Seething site (to starboard)

"1 Fell dead in Shotesham street" "1 in Church yard" "1 injured in Tree"

"road closed 100 yards S of Crown Point 262990?"

Police Report. "1st April 1945

"1621 (1) Fr NFS (1624) **Crashed Liberator Saxlingham**, G6915. To E 1622. To Po 1623

"1644 (2) Fr E (1640) Ref (1) above Saxlingham Ambulance Ordered out"

"1844 (9) FR E (1830) Ref (1) and (2) above, Saxlingham ambulance turned out in 20 minutes.

USAAF have dealt with wounded crew. Runner says **2 men bailed out about Stoke**. Probably rescued by USAAF

SUMMARY OF ABOVE REPORTS

It is 77 years since I and my friend witnessed the crash of the B24 at Grub Street Shotesham which actually occurred in 1942/3 and from memory the weather on that day was somewhat different to the reports for 1945 as it was quite warm and bright, very little cloud and visibility was good, probably more than 7/8 miles and there was hardly any wind.

The memo from the Group Flying Control Officer mentions that "at 1605 a crash was observed about 3 miles from the airfield (Hardwick) and gives the names of 3 crew members of 44-10577. This contradicts to some extent the Accident Report which gives the place of the crash as 8 miles North of Hardwick. The names of the 4 crew on this latter form correspond with the Flying Control memo plus the addition of the pilot 1st Lt William Lofton.

Checking the distances on a 1960 Air Navigation Map, **three miles from Hardwick** would place the aircraft approximately at **Saxlingham** and **(8miles North)** pinpoints the village of Trowse and Kirby Bedon both of which border on, or were, within the **Crown Point estate**.

On **AM Form 1100** extracts, reference is made **to a body in Shotesham Street and Churchyard and a road closed in Crown Point**. Crown Point is not very often referred to nowadays (2020) whereas during the 1940's it was often mentioned when referring to the Trowse and Kirby Bedon area.

However the reference to the bodies could have referred to the road from Stoke Church (Norwich Road) to Shotesham which might explain the reference to **2 crew bailing out at about Stoke** in the Police Report for 1st April 1945. From these reports, where this particular aircraft 44-10577 actually crashed is a mystery, but if the AAF 104 (Hardwick) report is correct then the aircraft would have come down at Saxlingham and not (ie. Grub Street) Shotesham. Also it would be an exceptional coincidence that two B24's crashed in exactly the same place at Shotesham 2 years apart.

CONCLUSION

Although there are several references to this aircraft on the internet indicating that the crash occurred in Shotesham, from the information contained in the above reports and as I witnessed the actual Shotesham Crash, I believe that **B24 44-10577** actually crashed in **Saxlingham**. Mistakes could easily have been made during the war by USAAF officials regarding village names as in the UK they are in such close proximity to each other which is something they would not have been used too.

MY REASONS FOR QUERYING THE ORIGINAL SHOTESHAM CRASH SITE REPORT

To my knowledge there were only two aircraft crashes in the parish of Shotesham during WW2 one of which I believe was a Mustang Fighter A/C and the other was a B24 Liberator. Although after 77 years I cannot remember the actual date of the day or the month in which the B24 crashed but I can definitely confirm that a B24 actually crashed in Shotesham sometime in either 1942/3 as I actually witnessed this event. The reason I can remember the year is that our family home in Norwich was destroyed during the two day blitz on the city. This episode occurred on the nights of 27th and 29th April 1942 and from this date until 11th December 1943 we had to stay with relatives at Falgate Farm Shotesham

The original reason for querying the information on the Flixton artefacts is that the aircraft was supposed to have crashed on 1st April **1945** at 1605hrs . The crash date given in 1945 was actually a **Sunday** which was not a school day therefore I would not have seen the Shotesham B24 crash. If the year had been misprinted and should have been 1943 then all other details could add up as to what I actually saw just after leaving school because the 1st April

1943 was a **Thursday**. This would mean a school day and the time could be correct as we were walking onto Shotesham Common at approximately that time.

DETAILS OF THE ACTUAL CRASH IN 1942/43

However on the day of the crash, my friend Joe Larter and I had left school at 15.45hrs and were walking to his house on the common which was approximately 300/400 yards from the school, when we saw a low flying B24 in the usual dark brown colour scheme, approaching us from the Shotesham St Mary area. At a guess it was flying at height of approximately 500 feet. I can only estimate the height as the aircraft disappeared from view behind the Tower of All Saints Church which stands on a hill approximately 60 feet above our position on the common and the crash occurred about a quarter of a mile further on. Within a minute we saw a large plume of black smoke and as youngsters this seemed exciting so we ran to my friends' house and got his bicycle and quickly cycled in the direction of the smoke which turned out to be Grub Street.

After leaving our cycles we walked across a field and approximately 300 yards from the crash site, we came across the body of an American Officer, presumably the pilot, with his parachute still attached. The parachute had not fully opened so the pilot must have jumped at a very low altitude as the B24 had crashed in a small wood a short distance away and burst into flames. By the time we arrived Very Lights and ammunition were exploding and several local inhabitants arrived, followed shortly after by the local policeman who turned up on his bicycle and told us all to move away. The following day all our school friends who lived in the St Mary's area told us that the crew had jumped out of an aircraft but believed that all had died.

At the time we always assumed the aircraft we saw on that day had come from Hardwick as the airfield was only about 4 air miles from Shotesham and I now believe that it was one of the first to accommodate USAAF aircraft in 1942/3. Unfortunately I have so far been unable to find any reference to the actual Shotesham Crash that myself and Joe witnessed. Once again this could be due to the fact that any records available might record the event as happening in Poringland, especially as Grub Street is very close to the boundaries of the two parishes.

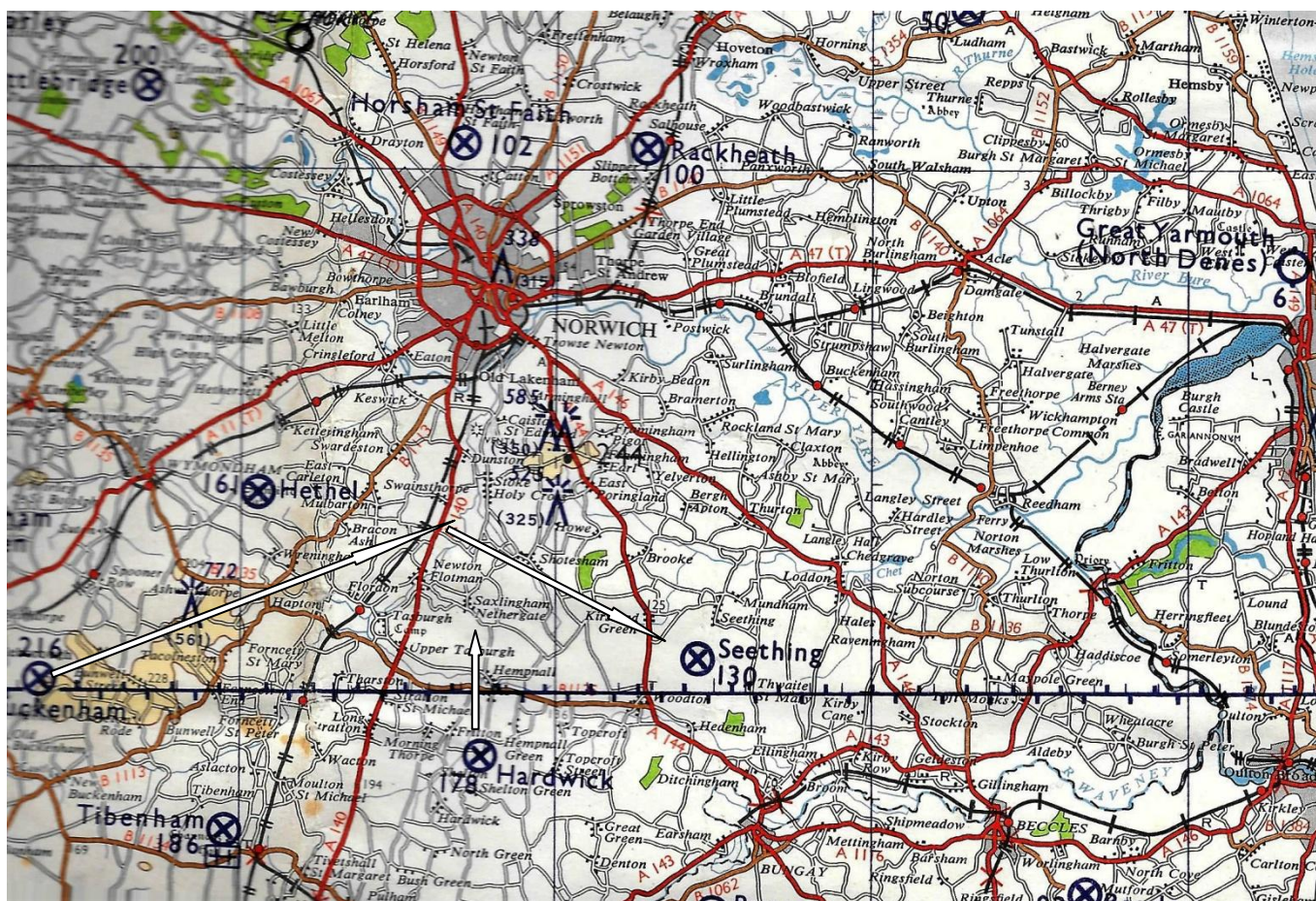
ADDENDUM

Since completing the above I have spoken to a relative of mine who lived in Shotesham for many years, including the war period, and he mentioned that a B24 had crashed in Saxlingham which would confirm my conclusion. The actual site of the crash was known locally as Mud Hall which was close to the remains of the church of St Marys'. I have also been advised that the current owner of the land on which the B24 crashed at Grub Street was told by his father that "the" crash "happened about 3pm on a Sunday as the children were coming out of Chapel. It was flying very low and approaching from the direction of Eastells Lane". This lane is close to Stoke Church which means the aircraft seen would have approached Shotesham from the West. This antidote of time, day and direction agrees with the various details in the crash reports which indicate that the aircraft seen was in fact **44-10577** which crashed at Saxlingham and not the one which crashed at Grub Street.

Using the details of the reports (AM 1100 extract & Flying Control Office)) and assuming **44-10577** completed the touch and go on the main Old Buckenham runway 07°, its course (see map) would then have taken the aircraft towards the Newton Flotman area. If it then turned **starboard** towards **Seething** (approximately 115°) this would take it over Stoke Holy Cross church approaching Shotesham and Saxlingham from the **west**. I have also been able to contact my friend Joe Larter who was with me on the day of the Shotesham crash and he also confirms the details I have given detailing what we did and saw of the Shotesham crash in 1942/43.

The aircraft which crashed at Grub Street was flying North Eastwards approaching Shotesham from the Saxlingham direction and **not from the west**. All this additional information confirms my original conclusion that **44-10577** was not the aircraft that crashed at Shotesham and I have recently come across the following extract which was on the Aviation Archaeological Investigation & Research website which confirms conclusively that **B24 44-10577** actually crashed at Saxlingham.

Date	A/C Type	Serial No.	Sqd	Group	Home Base	AF	Action	D	Pilot	Country	US State	Location
450401	B-24J	44-10577	734BS	453BG	144	8	KCREF	4	Lofton, William E	ENG		Saxlingham/ nr



Assuming that the touch and go was completed on runway 07° and the aircraft continued on this course, when it turned “starboard for site Seething” (115°) it must have been roughly where indicated above in order for the crew to have bailed out around Stoke Holy Cross. The memo from Flying Control Hardwick says “crash observed 3 miles north of airfield” which puts the crash roughly around the remains of St Marys church Saxlingham.

Ray Fisher
January 2020